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Montana Outdoors

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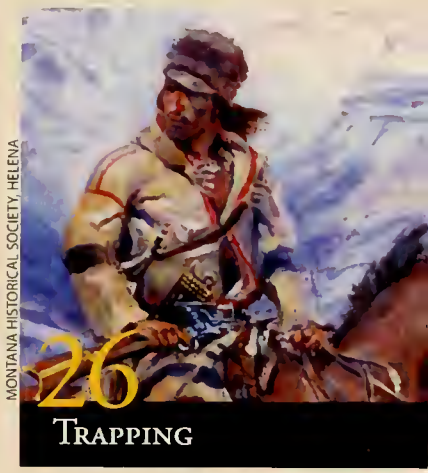

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STILL ENCHANTING Lewis and Clark marveled at the White Cliffs of the Missouri, which look the same today as they did 200 years ago. See page 18 for other unchanged landscapes that continue to enthrall explorers. Photo by Richard Mack.

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COVER Bull elk are among the primary targets of poachers lining their pockets with Montana's wildlife. Turn to page 6 to see what Montana is doing to stop this criminal activity. Photo by Donald M. Jones.

Touched by Hill's story

I am not a hunter. But I am an environmentalist who loves the earth untouched by human erosion, and I like to think about human and animal relationships. In the latest issue of *Montana Outdoors* (September–October), I almost missed a story that should not be missed, "The Underdog," by Gene Hill. I have placed it in my "Things to Remember" box so I can read it again and again. The love of a dog and its owner is a love I wish the whole world could understand and share. I wish every dog and owner could be as lucky as those two. Thank you for printing such a fine story about love.

Verlejean Parker
Aquatic Research Institute Library
Hayward, California

No easy answer

I read with interest the clip about cormorants and pelicans ("The glamour of wildlife research") in your September–October "Outdoors Report." Because I deal regularly with cormorant depredation issues (especially in and around the Great Lakes), I'm familiar with the question of whether or not they have negative impacts on fisheries. The answer is that there is no easy answer: The extent of conflict varies from site to site. I would caution Montana FWP from basing final decisions on diet studies alone, and a single year's worth at that. Unfortunately, more thorough and comprehensive analyses are expensive. But it is from such studies that answers become clearer. In American and Canadian waters of Lake Huron, for example, cormorant diet studies combined with fish population assessments revealed

that cormorants were at least a contributing factor in localized fishery declines. That doesn't mean the same is true at Canyon Ferry Reservoir or on other Montana waters, but in order to put fish-eating bird predation into proper perspective, it's important to consider various factors in fish populations, such as population abundance and trends, in addition to what the birds are eating.

Shauna Hanisch
Wildlife Biologist
USFWS Division of
Migratory Bird Management
Arlington, Virginia

Can a vaccine help?

Concerning your "Natural Wonders" piece on dogs and rattlesnakes: Our vet has been successful with a new vaccine that, the manufacturer says, will "defend your dog by creating an immunity that works right away to help neutralize the toxins."

Lin Peterson
Spokane, Washington

The jury is still out on the effectiveness of the vaccine, manufactured and distributed by Red Rock Biologics, a California biotechnology firm. The University of California–Davis Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital currently is not recommending the vaccine due to insufficient evidence that it works. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of vets nationwide appear to be stocking the vaccine. We called several vet clinics in Montana's rattlesnake regions and the response from Dr. Elmer Davis at Great Falls Veterinary Services was typical. "We use it because dog owners ask for it," he says. Dr. Davis also notes that of the dogs the clinic has injected with the vaccine, none have been bitten by snakes, so he can't vouch for its effectiveness: "About 40 percent of snakebites are dry hits anyway, where no venom is injected, so even if a dog was bit it would be hard to say how well the vaccine worked. Still, if I had a hunting dog, I'd probably use it."

Another fan of Ole's

I was pleasantly surprised to read in your September–October issue an article on a friend of mine, "Ole" Olsen. As a former state chairman and state council president of New Jersey Ducks Unlimited (I'm currently area chairman), I met Ole a number of years ago at a DU convention. I am now the proud owner of one of his decoys, which I purchased at a DU auction. Ole's magnanimity toward DU has been unbounded. He never hesitated when I asked him to donate a decoy for our annual auction. It is fitting that you have saluted an artist of his capabilities.

John A. Spizziri
Wyckoff, New Jersey

Hates wolves' eating habits

Your July–August issue was especially beautiful except for the cover and article on wolves. Ought not those people who want to hear a wolf howl be the ones who finance wolf management? I hate the way wolves tear down their prey. So did our ancestors, which is why they tried to get rid of wolves.

Arnold Guenther
Nekoosa, Wisconsin

Correction

A printing error obscured the answer to a July–August "Natural Wonders" question asking about the most environmentally friendly way to hike in groups. The answer should have read: "According to the National Outdoors Leadership School, you do less damage to the landscape and native plants if your group hikes single file along an established path. But if you must travel off-trail, it's best to spread out and not create a new trail."

"What have you got for watching the Discovery Channel?"

Consider a Cow Elk This Fall

Hunters who didn't get their elk last year might find it hard to believe, but Montana has too many elk in many parts of the state. The overabundance has caused winter range to be overgrazed and created problems for landowners who've seen their haystacks depleted and fences trampled.

It's the job of this department to manage Montana's wildlife. To manage elk, we rely on hunters to harvest a certain number of cow elk to prevent populations from getting too high. Unfortunately, not enough cows are being shot each year to keep elk numbers down.

Years ago I was a hunting guide, and I know from experience that most elk hunters would prefer to shoot a bull. There's prestige attached to those antlers, and I've been in more than a few elk camps where hunters got ribbed for shooting "just a cow."

But you can mount only so many heads, and if your main objective each elk season is to get up in the mountains and then bring home some meat for your family, it might make more sense to take a cow than to hold out for a bull and not get anything. Cow elk generally taste better. Bulls use up most of their fat reserves during the rut and, as a result, tend to have less-palatable meat. Antlers might look good on the wall, but they make for tough chewing.

Another reason to harvest a cow is that it helps with the overall management of Montana's elk population. If more hunters take cows in areas where elk numbers exceed population objectives, we can improve winter range and maybe increase frustrated landowners' tolerance for having elk on the landscape.

Many landowners appreciate hunters who will shoot a cow elk. Too often, hunters ask for permission to hunt elk but really mean "bull elk." That makes it tough for the landowner. Harvesting a cow does much more to lower the population than harvesting a bull.

Wisconsin has what it calls an Earn-a-Buck Program, in which hunters in some districts overrun with deer must shoot a doe before they "earn" the right to shoot a buck. I'm not advocating such a program for Montana's elk season, but it's an interesting idea that more hunters and landowners might begin discussing among themselves. I know of some landowners who tell inquiring hunters that if they agree to shoot a cow elk this season, the hunters will have an opportunity to go after a bull next year. It's something to think about.

Montana continues to look for innovative ways to bring elk (and deer) numbers down to levels more tolerable to ranchers and farmers. A few years ago, the legislature gave us authority to begin offering, in some hunting districts, the option of shooting a second elk. With these A-9 licenses, a hunter can shoot a cow early and still have an opportunity to take a bull later in the season.

This year we're trying to concentrate more hunting pressure on cow elk during Montana's five-week general season by eliminating most early and late hunts and liberalizing seasons. In many districts, hunters can now shoot any elk, not just brow-tined bulls as has been the case in recent years.

I like harvesting a big bull as much as the next hunter. But over the past ten years, I've passed on several bulls and instead have harvested cows. I like eating the high-quality meat, and I feel better knowing I'm helping manage Montana's elk herd. I hope other hunters will start feeling the same way.

—M. Jeff Hagener, *Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

NATURAL WONDERS

Illustrations by Peter Grosshauser

Q. ***I'm looking for a river where I can consistently catch 20-inch rainbows on dry flies.***

A. Your best bet would be the Bow River—in southern Alberta. No river in Montana *consistently* produces 20-inch trout on dries, though that's not to say you can't catch big trout on the surface here. Some of the top waters for taking 20-inch-plus trout on dries are the Missouri below Holter Dam (caddis and 'hoppers in summer), the Yellowstone ('hoppers in late summer), the Beaverhead ('hoppers in midsummer), and the Bighorn (BWO and midge patterns mid-April through May).

Q. ***How do ducks and geese keep their feet from freezing when it's 30 below zero?***

A. According to Jim Hansen, FWP Central Flyway coordinator in Billings, ducks and geese (and birds in general) have a higher heart rate and body temperature than humans, and their metabolic rate increases in cold weather. "All of that helps with the frozen-foot challenge," Hansen says. "However, the webs of their feet are susceptible to freezing, and in very cold weather you will see geese in a field or on a frozen pond spending a lot of time sitting with their feet tucked into their belly feathers. When it's very cold, Canada goose hunters may not see geese fly out to fields until mid-day or later."

? Wonder about some part of Montana's natural world? E-mail us at tdickson@mt.gov.

Idaho elk escapees concern FWP officials

The recent escape of domestic elk from a private game preserve in Idaho is a reminder of the threats to native wildlife posed by "alternative livestock."

In August, up to 160 domestic elk escaped from a fenced, privately owned game preserve near Rexburg, Idaho, about 10 miles west of Yellowstone National Park's southwestern corner and 50 miles south of the Montana border.

Some of the elk reportedly have been recaptured by the owner or shot by Idaho officials. According to Tim Feldner, FWP's commercial wildlife permitting manager, Montana hunters could be the front line of defense to keep remaining escapees from entering Big Sky Country.

Feldner says the Idaho elk have small metal ear tags. (Some wild elk being studied by FWP and Yellowstone National Park also have larger plastic ear tags.) "If you shoot any elk with an ear tag, call us at once," Feldner says.

Under Montana law, animals that escape from private facilities and are not recaptured within five days become the property of the state. They may be legally killed by officials or harvested by licensed hunters. Montana's elk season opened October 22.

FWP biologists say the most likely place the Idaho elk could turn up in Montana would be in the Snowcrest and Gravelly ranges, where wild elk from Idaho are known to visit. Wildlife officials are concerned that the domestic elk could spread disease into Montana's wild elk herds and contaminate the gene pool.

"Our elk have evolved over thousands of years to resist disease and survive the unique conditions of this region," Feldner says. "We don't want to mess up those healthy genes."

NPS

If you shoot an elk with an ear tag, no matter what color, call FWP.

If you shoot an elk with an ear tag or have other information on the escaped elk, call Feldner at (406) 444-4039.

Montana's CRP acreage in jeopardy

No national legislation will affect eastern and central Montana upland wildlife populations more than the Farm Bill, up for reauthorization in 2007. Montana now contains nearly 3.5 million acres of wildlife-rich grasslands due to the bill's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which pays landowners to convert croplands on highly erodible acres to native grasses and shrubs. The program, which began in 1987, has increased numbers of grassland wildlife such as sharp-tailed grouse, as well as waterfowl, prairie songbirds, deer, and raptors. FWP wildlife biologists say CRP has been critical in helping restore pheasant numbers in central and eastern Montana.

Fish also benefit due to the decrease in silt washing into streams from plowed fields.

Unfortunately, according to a federal farm policy expert, the future of CRP in Montana could be in trouble.

"Congress is now looking at focusing mote CRP acres on wetland protection," says Lynn Tjeerdsma, policy initiative manager for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, a coalition of conservation groups including Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. Tjeerdsma says most Montana CRP contracts will expire by 2010, leaving the state's eastern half with less grassland habitat.

"From what I can tell from congressional hearings being held this fall, it seems as though the arid plains regions stand a good chance of seeing their CRP acreage decline," Tjeerdsma says. "But if congressional leaders start hearing from their constituents, that could change."

JUDY WANTULOK

Sharptails are just one of many grassland species that could decline if CRP acreage is reduced.

Millionaire loner donates estate to wildlife habitat

North-central Montana mule deer hunters can thank a benevolent bachelor millionaire for a new public hunting spot.

LeRoy Beckman drove an old panel truck, wore bib overalls, and lived off Social Security. But the Great Falls farmer, who appeared nearly impoverished, was worth nearly $3 million

Free "flights" over Montana's hunting and fishing hotspots

A new free computer imaging program offers users a bird's-eye view of their favorite hunting and fishing haunts. Launched in 2004, Google Earth is a downloadable program that combines satellite imagery with maps to allow you to zoom in on almost any place on earth. The program is not especially useful for finding public hunting lands, access roads, or federal land boundaries, but it's a great way to "fly" above areas to see the relationships among ridges, streams, peaks, parks, and other landscape features. You can even tilt and rotate the landscape as though flying in a helicopter. The highest definition images—in some cases taking you close enough to see cars—are of cities and towns. Most national forests and wilderness areas have lower definition, though on some, such as the Gallatin National Forest north of Bozeman, you can actually see individual trees. Download the program for free at earth.google.com.

when he died in 1997, at 88.

Jim Luoma of Sand Coulee, a friend of Beckman's, told the Associated Press that the bachelor grew up poor, farmed as a young man, then put his savings into gold stocks and later oil investments.

Beckman's will stipulated that the money should be used to purchase mule deer habitat open to public hunting. In 2005, FWP accepted the fourth and final gift of contiguous land purchased with Beckman's money. The 6,500-acre Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 11 miles northeast of Denton, features grasslands, conifers, and rolling hills, and is bisected by the Judith Rivet. In addition to mule deer, a species Beckman particularly enjoyed, the wildlife area holds pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, raptors, and songbirds.

Graham Taylor, FWP regional wildlife manager in Great Falls, says one species the land doesn't hold is elk. "Mr. Beckman stipulated he didn't want to help elk," says Taylor. "Apparently, he was not interested in that species."

Taylor says FWP acquired the main portion of the WMA when Lewistown area wildlife biologist Tom Stivers learned of a couple who wanted to sell their land so they could retire.

JIM HUFFIELD

Friends say Beckman loved mule deer and wanted his $3 million estate used to benefit the big-eared species.

"At the time it was all platted out as a subdivision, but they decided to sell it to us to preserve the land as wildlife habitat," Taylor says. "That first purchase became the nucleus of the entire wildlife area."

Since then, FWP has purchased three adjacent tracts. Taylor says the property boundaries are currently being posted with signs so the public can find and use the area. Maps of the Beckman WMA are available from the Great Falls regional and Lewistown area offices. WMAs are open to public hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, hiking, cross-country skiing, and camping.

Parks to help with Indian education

Montana students will have new and better opportunities to learn about Indian history and culture thanks to a new collaboration between FWP and the state Office of Public Instruction (OPI).

Montana has committed itself to carrying out a provision of the 1972 state constitution mandating that schools teach all students about Indian tribes and reservations. The OPI received $3.3 million from the 2005 Montana Legislature to carry out the Indian Education for All law.

The office collaborated with state parks officials to create 25 K-12 lesson plans that feature a Montana state park. Teachers can use the plans in classrooms, and parks staff can adapt the plans for their educational programs.

"This is a great fit for state parks," says Ken Soderberg, FWP Parks Division Visitors Services Bureau chief. "State parks are natural outdoor classrooms that provide opportunities for local teachers to use lessons that relate to the community where students live."

MONTANA FWP

Council Grove State Park is the site of the Hellgate Treaty, an important part of Indian history.

Linda McCulloch, superintendent of public instruction for Montana, says the parks component fits with the program's emphasis on integrating Indian education into students' lives beyond just the school day.

Half of Montana's 50 state parks—including Chief Plenty Coup, Council Grove, Missouri Headwaters, Pictograph, and Rosebud Battlefield—are featured in the new Indian education lesson plans.

"It's part of our mission to help interpret these and other historic and cultural sites, and this new collaboration with OPI fits in real well with what we do here," Soderberg says.

You can find the Indian education lesson plans on the OPI website (opi.state.mt.us) and the FWP website (fwp.mt.gov).

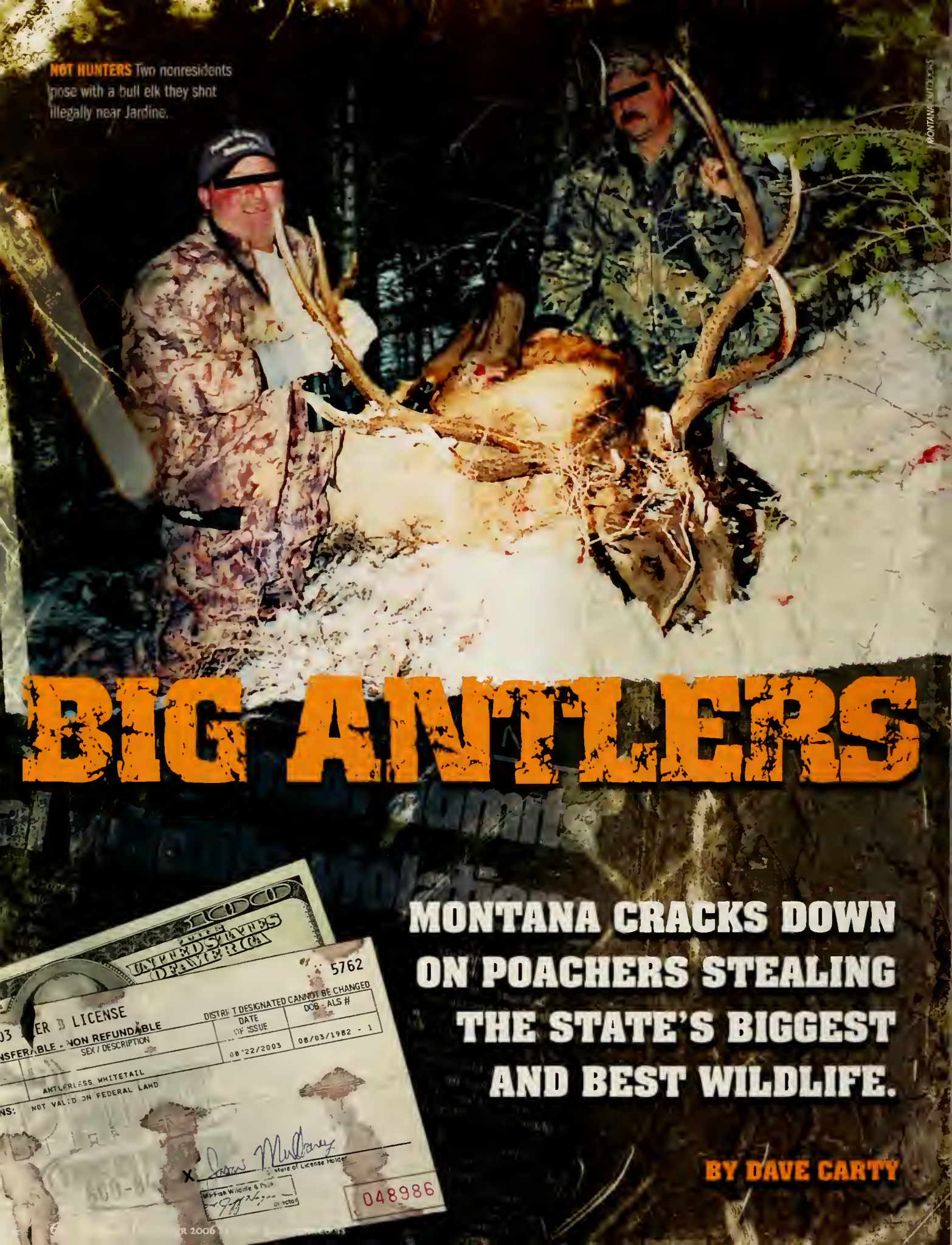
Libby boy lands record pumpkinseed

MONTANA FWP

Nathan Bache says he was fishing for bass when he hooked the record sunfish.

Another young angler has entered the Montana record books for catching a jumbo fish. First a Malta boy and his grandfather caught the state's new record channel catfish in May. Then on July 30, ten-year-old Nathan Bache of Libby landed the largest pumpkinseed sunfish ever recorded in Montana. Pumpkinseeds, a nonnative sunfish species introduced to several Montana streams and lakes, look similar to bluegill sunfish. The boy caught the 9.5-inch, 0.96-pound fish in Upper Thompson Lake using a green jig. He was fishing from a boat with his parents.

"I cast by some weeds, and the fish bit hard," he says. "It fought like a 2-pound bass. I never saw a sunfish that big." The fish, later weighed in Libby on certified scales, edged the existing state record by just .01 pound. Nathan says he plans to have his trophy fish mounted.



NOT HUNTERS Two nonresidents pose with a bull elk they shot illegally near Jardine.

MONTANA OUTDOORS

BIG ANTLERS

MONTANA CRACKS DOWN ON POACHERS STEALING THE STATE'S BIGGEST AND BEST WILDLIFE.

BY DAVE CARTY

You have to actually hold it in your hands to truly comprehend the loss.

The 30-inch-wide mule deer rack, thick beamed and long tined, would have entered the record book as the largest typical mule deer ever taken in Montana. But instead of earning a place of honor in a sporting goods store or a skilled hunter's living room, the monster muley is, for now, unceremoniously parked on a chair in the Helena office of Jim Kropp, chief of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Enforcement Division. In 2005, game wardens seized the rack from Kelly Frank, a criminal on probation for previous wildlife violations who was charged with shooting the animal out of season near Choteau.

"This is a monster buck, a truly magnificent animal," says Kropp. "It was stolen from the people of Montana."

Unfortunately, the massive muley is not the first trophy animal to be poached in Montana, nor will it be the last. The illegal killing of deer, elk, and other big game is increasing across the state, as serial poachers driven by pride, money, or both devise new ways to steal Montana's trophy animals. The illegal activity has required state and federal enforcement officials to find innovative ways to nab the criminals—and increasingly rely on the public for help.

and BIG EGOS

Major cases

Though Kropp says most poachers are individuals killing just one animal, his office is seeing greater numbers of organized operations in which several people kill scores of animals. Some of the bigger Montana cases in recent years:

■ **Huntley Poaching Project:** In 2006, 17 people, including a teen-aged male and his mother, were charged with illegally killing dozens of deer in Yellowstone, Treasure, and Rosebud counties. Kropp calls it "one of the most blatant examples of poaching I've ever seen." Investigators seized 50 big game heads and antlers from several homes near Huntley. Several defendants, whom one warden called "thrill seekers," were charged with illegally killing deer, taking only the heads, and leaving carcasses in fields. Says Kropp: "It was wanton waste of the worst kind you could imagine."

■ **Operation Cinnabar:** Earlier in 2006, a federal judge sentenced Danny McDonald, a commercial poacher from Gardiner, to a year in federal prison and $50,000 in fines and restitution for illegally leading out-of-state hunters to trophy bulls leaving Yellowstone National Park for the Cinnabar Basin. So far, 21 additional people have been fined and had their hunting privileges revoked, and another dozen out-of-state hunters are still under investigation. Game wardens and federal agents have seized 30 elk heads and racks as part of the investigation.

■ **Mullaney Case:** In 2005, a judge ordered Jason Mullaney of Butte to pay more than $23,000 in restitution, perform 1,000 hours of community service during a six-year deferred jail sentence, and give up all hunting privileges in Montana and 20 other states for six years. Mullaney had pled guilty to three felony charges of unlawfully killing 17 deer, five antelope (including a record-book buck), two black bears, and a mountain goat.

■ **Motarie Case:** Gary Motarie of Cut Bank, a self-described antler "addict," was sentenced in 2004 to 18 months in prison for poaching a huge bull elk off the Sun River Wildlife Management Area. Motarie had killed the animal after having his hunting privileges suspended for 20 years for poaching elk in Lewis and Clark County.

■ **Ruth Case:** In 2003, wardens acting on tips raided a compound near Seeley Lake owned by Dean and Renita Ruth. They seized more than 100 big game mounts and racks, including deer, elk, bear, and moose, along with a rifle silencer and hundreds of photos of the couple's clients posing over dead animals. The Ruth poaching ring killed so many deer in the area that FWP biologists later recorded a significant decline in mature buck numbers when conducting annual surveys to set hunting seasons.

The Ruths were charged with 12 felony counts of poaching in Montana, as well as numerous poaching charges in Pennsylvania. In 2004, a federal judge sentenced Dean Ruth to four months in prison and restricted him from ever owning a firearm again. A Montana district court judge later ordered the couple to pay $19,000 in restitution, revoked Dean Ruth's hunting privileges for life, and sentenced him to 20 years in prison with 15 years suspended.

Public wildlife for sale

As with so much other crime, money is often the motivation behind poaching. Kropp says when he began working for FWP

in the 1980s, "most poachers we saw were people shooting deer or elk for meat, or maybe someone taking advantage of an opportunity like seeing an elk in a field after the season had closed."

But over the last 20 years, greed has driven a new breed of poachers to line their wallets with Montana's wildlife. "Record-book heads like the Kelly Frank mule deer rack can sell for $30,000 to $40,000 or even more," Kropp says.

With that kind of money, a growing number of people are willing to do whatever it takes to put large racks in the hands of wealthy clients. "What we're seeing is the intersection of big antlers with big egos," Kropp adds. "There's a growing interest across the country in having a big trophy on the wall—no matter how it's taken—and that's what's driving a lot of the poaching in Montana."

Doug Goessman agrees. "Everything in this world is for sale, and we've found that wildlife has become an extremely valuable commodity," says the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) special agent, who works closely out of his Bozeman office with state game wardens on major poaching operations.

Goessman points out that the odds of drawing a bighorn sheep or trophy bull elk permit in Montana can be as high as 100 to 1. "Some people don't want to go through the system legally," Goessman says. "They know

"Some of these poachers tell us, 'You guys out here in Montana sure take your wildlife seriously.'"

they can just plunk down several thousand dollars, circumvent the whole permit lottery process, and kill elk, deer, sheep, or whatever out of season."

Goessman notes that as the value of trophy mounts has grown in recent years, more poachers find it worthwhile to take the risk of getting caught. "Many people are more affluent now and have more money to pay for antlers," he says. "Then you have some folks in Montana who, because they're not as well off, take that chance to make a few bucks."

No one is sure what accounts for the growing interest in trophy antlers and mounts, but the outdoors media may be partially to blame. Hunting magazines have always glorified trophy animals. Traditionally, the emphasis was on the hunt—scouting, outdoors skills, marksmanship—and the trophy was portrayed as the reward for an investment of time, effort, and experience. No longer. In the last few decades, many articles have shifted the emphasis from hunting trophy animals to simply *shooting* trophy animals. Outdoor TV shows and videos are no better, showing hunters knocking down one large-racked buck or bull after another.

A growing number of so-called "sportsmen" desire big racks like the ones they see in print and on screen to gratify their egos. Lacking the time or discipline to develop the skills needed to pursue big game in traditional ways, some pay for "canned hunts" (shooting animals in fenced enclosures). Others pay to kill trophy animals illegally or purchase mounts illegally obtained.

Public involvement

Since the early 20th century, poaching that involves the movement of illegally taken game or mounts across state lines has been a federal crime under the Lacey Act. But many wildlife-related crimes that occur within state borders are considered minor offenses. Knowing that many poachers can easily absorb small fines as a cost of doing business, Gary Carvajal, president of the Montana Bowhunters Association (MBA), says his group is pushing for stiffer penalties and higher restitution.

"Our position is that fines levied against poachers should teach them a lesson and provide a disincentive for poaching," he says. "In the past, if a person was caught shooting a deer or an elk out of season, it was only a $200 or $300 fine at the very most and just a misdemeanor."

The MBA co-authored a trophy restitution bill passed by the Montana Legislature that requires increased payments—ranging from $2,000 for an antelope to $30,000 for a bighorn sheep ram—to the state for illegally killing wildlife. And they are pushing to make more poaching violations felonies.

Carvajal and Kropp say that, until recently, many law-abiding hunters haven't been concerned about poaching. "Many will turn a blind eye to what they know is going on," Kropp says.

PARKING THE EVIDENCE Armed with a search warrant, game wardens found these whitetail bucks in the garage of a Butte poacher. A judge later sentenced the criminal to pay $23,000 in restitution for wildlife stolen from the people of Montana.

THE GOOD GUYS (From left to right): Warden Sergeant Mark Anderson, Warden Investigator Chad Murphy, Warden Captain Sam Sheppard, USFWS Special Agent Doug Goessman, and Warden Jim Miller display some of the mounts and racks confiscated as part of Operation Cinnabar. The poaching ring's leader, who accepted more than $90,000 for helping clients illegally kill the wildlife, is currently serving time in federal prison.

1/2 LEWIS

But that may be changing. Carvajal says hunters and others are reading about poaching rings, "and they're realizing that commercial poachers are stealing wildlife from the people of this state, both hunters and nonhunters."

Angered by the wholesale wildlife robbery across Montana, some citizens have chosen to act. Since it began in 1985, the state's Turn in Poachers Program (TIP-MONT) has received thousands of calls resulting in hundreds of arrests. "We're getting a growing number of complaints from hunters who are realizing that Montana doesn't have a limitless supply of trophy wildlife," Kropp says. "They are mad that poachers steal the biggest and best animals right off the landscape."

The toll-free line receives more than 1,300 calls each year from hunters and others reporting suspicious poaching activity. Callers may remain anonymous and, if a tip results in a conviction, are eligible for a reward of up to $1,000.

"Calls to TIP-MONT continue to be our number one source for leads on poaching cases," Kropp says.

Randy Arnold, a game warden in Helena who previously worked undercover, offers Operation Cinnabar as an example of how a simple phone call from a concerned citizen can shut down a poaching operation.

"A fellow was flying back to Montana from out of state and overheard some guys from Tennessee on the plane talking about their upcoming Montana bull elk 'hunt,'" he says. "The guy knew the season was closed and heard them talk about 'ranch tags,' which don't exist in Montana, so he suspected it was some sort of illegal operation. When the plane landed, he called TIP-MONT from the airport. It turned out that there was this huge commercial poaching operation going on, and he was the one that turned us on to it."

Such public vigilance and the efforts of USFWS and FWP agents and game wardens result in the capture and conviction of dozens of poachers each year. Yet both federal and state enforcement officials concede that far more poachers are still out there stealing Montana's wildlife.

"We miss a lot," Goessman admits. "It's kind of like asking a narcotics agent how much dope is still out there. There's a lot."

So many deer were poached in the area that biologists later recorded a significant decline in mature buck numbers.

Freelance writer Dave Carty of Bozeman is a frequent contributor to Montana Outdoors.

MONTANA'S RECENT ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS

Proud of its reputation for abundant wildlife and progressive wildlife conservation, Montana has little tolerance for poaching. Recently, the state has stepped up efforts to thwart the growing problem:

Greater fines and punishment. Backed by the Montana Bowhunters Association, new legislation has raised fines and restitution. Judges are revoking hunting privileges for years or even a lifetime—and not just in Montana but also in a nonresident poacher's home state. Judges are also putting serial poachers behind bars. Kelly Frank, who poached a record-book buck near Choteau, is serving time in a federal penitentiary in Colorado.

"We're one of the few states to send people to prison for poaching," says FWP enforcement chief Jim Kropp. "Jail time is a real deterrent."

FWP is pushing to make poachers pay for court and investigative costs, similar to what's imposed on those convicted of other crimes. And the department will introduce legislation in 2007 that would impose felony penalties for some types of unlicensed and illegal outfitting and channel restitution money into FWP game law enforcement programs.

Increased electronic surveillance. FWP's Automated Licensing System allows wardens to instantly check to see if suspected poachers have purchased the correct licenses and permits. In Operation Cinnabar, for example, wardens found that none of the suspects had special hunting permits and several had no licenses at all. FWP routinely cross-checks hunting licenses against driver's licenses to ensure nonresidents aren't buying less-expensive resident hunting licenses.

A CALL TO ACTION This fall, FWP and several statewide sportsmen's organizations began a statewide campaign alerting Montanans of the poaching problem and how they can help.

More investigators: In 2005, the Montana Legislature gave FWP authority to hire two new regional investigators to increase the department's ability to investigate and prosecute large-scale wildlife crimes. FWP also has four undercover wardens working on poaching cases. A special prosecutor with the state Attorney General's Office spends half her time prosecuting wildlife felonies.

Greater public awareness: Over the past year, FWP wardens have been traveling the state giving presentations on the poaching problem. This fall, the department launched a major public awareness campaign in cooperation with the Montana Bowhunters Association, Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, and Montana Wildlife Federation. The campaign aims to convince Montanans that poachers are stealing the state's most valued big game specimens and robbing hunters and wildlife watchers of recreational opportunities.

Which is why FWP is beefing up its anti-poaching efforts. The department recently distributed to sporting goods stores posters alerting customers of the poaching problem and promoting the 1-800-TIP-MONT line for reporting suspicious activity. New TV and radio ads, bumper stickers, and a traveling display at fairs and other events highlight the poaching problem. The department has also been using its Automated Licensing System to cross-check hunting licenses against driver's licenses to validate residency.

All this work is meant to ensure that public wildlife stays in public ownership—and that the gains made by hunters and other conservationists over the past century to restore big game populations and protect critical wildlife habitat have not been in vain. Stricter enforcement, tougher penalties, and greater public involvement show that Montana means business when it comes to defending its treasured elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and other game animals.

"We've sat down with some of these poachers after they've been through federal court and sentenced, and time and again they tell us, 'You guys out here in Montana sure take your wildlife seriously,'" Goessman says.

MONTANA FWP

DUMPING GROUNDS In 2005, game wardens found dozens of deer in fields across Treasure, Yellowstone, and Rosebud counties. Poachers had cut off the heads and left the bodies to rot.

Who you don't know can hurt you

When Montana's game wardens go undercover to nab game violators, they're just as likely to be hiding out at a tavern as in the woods. Montana Warden Randy Arnold of Helena spent four years doing undercover work, racking up dozens of arrests and a lifetime of good stories. Here's one of them:

"Pen Ruiz was a guy in his late 20s out of the Bitterroot Valley who was operating illegally as a fishing and waterfowl hunting guide," Arnold recalls. "We also had reason to believe he and some friends had killed deer in the spring, which we later found to be true.

"We'd heard from an informant that Ruiz was planning a party in a bar in Stevensville. So I went with Mike Martin, another undercover investigator, to the bar. I was posing as an executive search consultant from Montana assisting Martin, who was posing as a friend from Iowa planning to move here and start a business. We dressed like businessmen, and when we got to the bar we let it be known we wanted to fish the Bitterroot. When Ruiz showed up, we asked the waitress if there was anyone around who could take us out, because we were 'sure interested in going trout fishing.' She turned around and pointed right at Ruiz and said, 'That guy's an outfitter, you ought to talk to him.'

"Well, Ruiz wasn't an outfitter, but he was acting as one. He immediately came over to our table and sold himself as an outfitter, and the very next day he took my partner on the river fly fishing illegally. And that was the beginning of our two-year investigation of Ruiz."

Ruiz was ultimately charged with poaching a deer and multiple counts of illegally taking people fishing and waterfowl hunting. Several other suspects were also charged with illegally killing deer.

On the Right

Reading the daily dramas of Montana wildlife

By Ben Long

The scene was Shakespearean, written with blood on snow rather than ink on paper. Or maybe it was more like a backwoods version of a TV detective program. Except the corpses and killers were four-legged. And it was fact, not fiction.

It was February. My wife, Karen, and I were skiing down a snowed-in road in northwestern Montana. The world was white, so the dead doe stood out. The carcass was minus a foreleg but so fresh it steamed, with no trace of rigor mortis. What had we stumbled across?

When Montanans are in the mood to brag, they make claim to the best fishing, the best hunting, and the best wildlife watching in the United States. Maybe they're right. I would also wager that Big Sky Country offers the best wildlife tracking anywhere. We have a combination of abundant and diverse wildlife unparalleled in the Lower 48 states and plentiful snow. Whether you hike armed with a rifle or simply a healthy curiosity, Montana is a library of mystery and drama, writ large over the landscape. The stories are both ancient and new, refreshed by each snowfall and rainstorm.

Trailcraft is the ancient skill of interpreting animal sign to tell the stories of nature. "It's like being a detective," says Brian Giddings, who coordinates the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Furbearer Program. "You have to look at all the clues: track size, trail pattern, stride length, and scat [animal droppings]." The sum total is part data, part imagination. The reward comes when the puzzle pieces click into place and the picture takes form. Because it reveals so much about wildlife we rarely see, tracking adds an exciting dimension to any nature outing.

Why track?

By tracking, we enter secret worlds where humans rarely venture. I have briefly glimpsed only two lynx and two wolverines during my 39 years, but I have followed the tracks of several for miles at a time. I have actually seen only one live northern flying squirrel, but I have often found their flat tails and other remains under owl roosts. The pugmark of a bobcat adds interest to an empty dirt road, and it's thrilling to see the territorial claw marks that male grizzlies scratch into the boles of lodgepole pines.

JUDY WALTON

BEAR HERE Wildlife leave all types of clues indicating their presence, such as claw marks on an aspen.

Though some of my best tracking has been in wilderness areas, I don't need to venture far from home to locate animal sign. My family and I live not far from downtown Kalispell. In the past year, I have followed split valentine tracks left by fawns devouring our flower beds, the foot path of a skunk leading under the boat shed, and mud-smeared paw prints on the front sidewalk that led to a ruined bird feeder surrounded by bear scat loaded with chokecherry pits.

Part of tracking's appeal is that clues are rarely complete, leaving much to the imagination. What looks like a large dog print could be a wolf's. *You've heard that wolves are now living in the area; was this one of them? Are you the first to see its tracks?* Another track trail indicates an animal loping through the snow. *Is it a wolverine? A fisher? What was it doing here? If you follow the track, will you actually see it?*

Tracking also has practical applications. For hunters, a track is often the shortest route between a game animal and a full freezer. For biologists and naturalists, every track is a piece of data adding to the body of knowledge

Track

COYOTE TRACKS IN A SNOWFIELD AT SUNRISE BY JEFF HENRY

used to understand and manage wildlife.

FWP wildlife managers rely on track surveys to help them understand how various wildlife populations are faring from year to year. Giddings oversees 29 track survey routes in the forested, deep-snow mountains of Montana. Each year, 18 biologists stationed across western Montana cover routes from 9 to 36 miles long, usually three times each winter as snowpack allows. The surveyors count the track trails of snowshoe hares, pine squirrels, and other prey species, as well as furbearers such as bobcats and American martens. The biologists conduct all the surveys on snowmobiles except for one inside the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, which they do on skis.

"It's hard to get information on live fishers and wolverines," Giddings says. "You can't count them from the air, like with deer and elk, because most furbearers tend to be nocturnal and solitary. Snow track surveys are one of the few tools we have to monitor these populations."

Ben Long is a freelance writer in Kalispell.

> I could even tell where the herd bull had passed, because his tall antlers had knocked frost off higher branches.

How to track

Good trailcraft comes from developing the habit of looking for and identifying sign, and then puzzling it out. Truly observant trackers learn to maintain an uncanny balance between looking underfoot for sign while looking around for the animals themselves.

Obtaining such skills takes time, but it's something anyone can learn. Getting started in tracking is as easy as buying a secondhand field guide and heading into the woods. If you happen to know an experienced tracker who might be willing to teach you firsthand, cultivate that friendship.

Tracks are easiest to find and follow in snow or mud. The best conditions are an inch or two of fresh snow over a firm base. Tracking is usually ideal roughly three days after a snowfall, when animals have had plenty of time to move about, but not so long that the snow melts or the tracks become buried under wind-blown snow. Once, in the Cabinet Mountains under ideal snow conditions, I followed the trails of seven large mammals—elk, mule and white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, mountain lion, and wolf—in a single November day. (Is it any wonder I consider Montana the nation's top tracking state?)

During a snowfall, you might not see as many tracks (because falling snow can cover tracks even a few minutes old), but those you do see will certainly be fresh. Snow that's

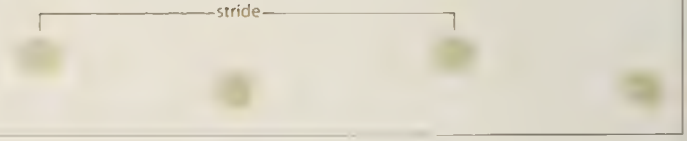
Solving the trail's secrets

TOES AND CLAWS

Paw prints can be puzzling. Wild dogs (foxes, coyotes, wolves) tend to have diamond-shaped paws that are longer than they are wide, while wild cats (bobcats, lynx, cougars) leave pugmarks that are more circular. Wild dogs have four toes with claw marks, while the cats have four toes with no claw marks (because they retract their claws when walking). Members of the weasel family (martens, fishers, wolverines) have five toes and claw marks.

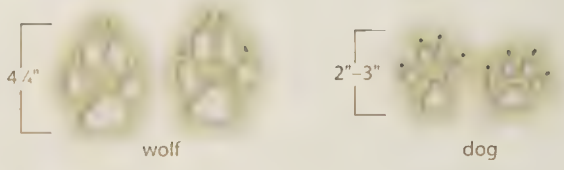
STRIDE

When tracking, note the distance between the first and third track in a four-track pattern. This measure (the stride) gives a good sense of the animal's body length, a very handy clue. For example, a mountain lion and lynx have the same size track, but the lion's stride is much longer. (Note: Many tracks are actually *two* tracks—the back foot stepping onto the front foot track.)



LUPUS OR LABRADOR?

Wolf and domestic dog prints may appear similar, but wolf tracks are particularly robust and generally larger than the largest dog track. Wolves also tend to travel in a direct path; they don't have time to dilly-dally and smell every tree like dogs do.



slightly wet but not melting clearly records details of the print, such as the number of toes. Powdery snow shows trail patterns but often hides footprint details.

Occasionally, tracking conditions are so good you don't even have to look at the ground. One of my most enjoyable elk hunts was through a lodgepole pine forest cloaked in heavy hoarfrost. The herd I was pursuing had knocked all the frost off the lower boughs as it passed, so I simply followed a tunnel of green through an otherwise white forest. I could even tell where the herd bull had passed, because his tall antlers had knocked frost off higher branches.

Hunters attempt to follow a track to its maker. Scientists, often more interested in learning an animal's behavior than actually seeing the critter, usually backtrack. That's because a pursued animal may try to avoid detection by fleeing as quickly and directly as possible. By following a backtrack, you get a more accurate picture of the animal's natural behavior. Either way, the trail will probably take you far and deep, well off the trails and roads most people prefer.

DONALDMJONES.COM

COMING OR GOING? Hunters and trappers are especially skilled at reading animal sign. Fresh, wet snow makes tracking easier.

"Most important in becoming a nature detective is for you to learn to think like an animal—more specifically like a wild animal," writes tracking expert and University of Colorado wildlife research associate James Halfpenny in *A Field Guide to Mammal Tracking in North America*. "Once you know the natural history of the animals you are working with, the easier it is to think like them."

As you begin to track, you'll soon learn that nature can be brutal. Rabbit or mouse tracks frequently disappear under the sweeping brush strokes of a raptor's wings. Blood or a dragging limb may indicate the animal was injured by a predator or in an accident. Once, I followed a set of coyote tracks up a frozen creek until I found the carcass of a deer that had broken through the ice and died. Below the ice, the deer was frozen in perfect condition; above the ice, coyotes had gnawed the skull and neck vertebrae clean to the bone.

The poop on scatology

Scatology, the study of animal droppings, is another type of tracking, though not one for the squeamish. It's easy to get started: My two-year old rides on my shoulders in the

MIND THE MUD

To see tracks others miss in the summer, make a habit of checking the mud around puddles or along stream banks when you cross a creek or beach a canoe.

LOOK OVER HAIR

In powdery snow, it can be difficult to distinguish a moose track from that of an elk. Look closely in animal beds for strands of long, dark moose hair, which is looser than elk hair and pulls out more easily when the animal beds down.

elk moose

OTHER CLUES

Look for marks in addition to footprints. Otters slide along on their bellies; porcupines brush the snow with their quills. A carnivore carrying prey will often drag it along one side or put it down for a rest.

otter

TRAIL PATTERN

You can often identify an animal by the trail pattern it leaves in the snow. For example, members of the weasel family tend to leave a bounding gait pattern. "I look for a trail pattern that is different or stands out in the landscape," says FWP Furbearer Program coordinator Brian Giddings. "From there, I look for more sign, like an intact footprint, that tells me more about the animal."

weasel family rabbit or mouse family

BLACK CURVED, GRIZZLY STRAIGHT

Since both black and grizzly bears vary in size, track size alone won't tell you which species you've come across. Instead, focus on the toes and claws. Black bear toes tend to fall in a curved line, while grizzly toes run more straight across. Both grizzly and black bear prints can have claw marks. The grizzly's can be up to 3 inches long.

grizzly (front paw)

black bear (front paw)

WHAT CAME THIS WAY?

1. ring-necked pheasant flying off snow (Brent & Della Lonner); 2. raccoon tracks (Michael H. Francis); 3. pronghorn crossing beneath a fence (Michael H. Francis); 4. river otter tracks (John Lambing); 5. wild turkey feathers and droppings beneath a roosting tree (donaldmjones.com); 6. mountain goat hair on a twig (donaldmjones.com); 7. deer rub on saplings (Steven Akre); 8. grizzly track (Judy Wantuloh); 9. bear scat containing chokecherry pits (Craig & Liz Larcom); 10. mountain lion tracks (Andy Long); 11. snake tracks in mud (D. Linnell Blank).

woods, and whenever we see dark pellets on the ground, he points and shouts, "Moose poop!" He's often right.

Studying scat often requires poking into the droppings. Kick apart a pile of bear scat and you'll most likely see huckleberries and cow parsnip—and occasionally the crunched bones and hooves of some creature the bear devoured. Coyote scat is often laced with hair from carcass scavenging, while domestic dog poop rarely contains hair. If deer and elk were recently in the area, any pellets you find will be soft, dark, and even warm.

Sometimes you'll find scat and tracks together in a single sighting. One spring day along the North Fork of the Flathead River, I found the track of a wolf, pressed perfectly into a pile of grizzly dung. Another time, on the northern range of Yellowstone National Park, I stepped over a fresh bison flop and noticed the even fresher print of a grizzly bear, squished perfectly into the brown matrix.

Seeing scat may be the best way to know grizzlies are present. Missoula-based bear expert Chuck Jonkel urges folks to "put on their bear glasses" when in grizzly country, keeping an eye peeled for signals the Great Bear is nearby. Except in winter, scat is much more common than tracks, as are overturned rocks and busted logs that show where bears have hunted ants. Grizzlies act like furry rototillers in alpine areas, uprooting the sod to nibble roots of glacier lilies and other plants. Train your eye to identify likely rubbing trees and signposts that bears use as backscratchers. Look closely, and some will be bristling with silver-tipped hairs.

One time at a campground, I noticed a trashcan next to my tent site with its lid ajar and a muddy smear on the side. I followed a trail of chicken bones, napkins, and an empty plastic bucket that culminated in a pile of bear dung. Black or grizzly, I'm not sure, but even without a track, those clues convinced me to sleep in the car that night.

BACK TRACK Following tracks, like these of a marten (bounding toward the peak in the left track trail and then turning and bounding back in the right track trail), can provide a glimpse into the secretive lives of wildlife that most people only see on TV.

PATRICK KOLAR

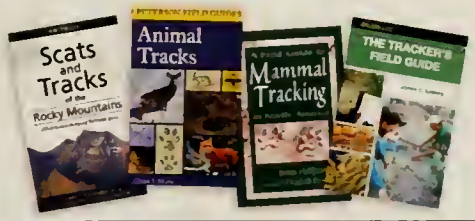
And what of that freshly killed white-tailed doe in the snow my wife and I found while skiing? The list of suspects was long, because Montana forests are full of deer eaters. We quickly narrowed it down, however, when we spied the large, round, four-toed tracks. The adult female cougar had ambushed the doe from under a fir, leapt twice before landing on the deer's back, and broke her neck so the doe crumpled with nary a kick.

How do I know the cat was a female? Further investigation under the fir tree showed where two kittens had waited and watched while their mother caught dinner.

Karen and I weren't the only ones getting a lesson that day.

FURTHER READING

Tracking field guides are indispensable to beginners and experts alike. The venerable *Field Guide to Animal Tracks* by Olaus Murie is a classic, and James Halfpenny's *A Field Guide to Mammal Tracking in North America* takes lessons further, with notes and diagrams of trail patterns and even a photo key of scat. FalconGuide publishes a handy guide called *Scats and Tracks of the Rocky Mountains* (also written by Halfpenny) as well as the comprehensive *The Tracker's Field Guide*, by James C. Lowrey.



CLUELESS

Photographer Ron Boggs says his son had long enjoyed the award-winning Nickelodeon children's show *Blue's Clues*. But the boy noticed that the show used a cat print (no claws) as its logo and a running theme throughout the show. "Unfortunately, Blue is a dog," says Boggs, who lives near Helena. "This baffled my five-year-old son, who by that age could tell a bobcat track from a coyote track. He kept asking me why *Blue's Clues* continued to use the wrong paw print. I guess that's something only a rural kid would notice."

STILL SCENES OF VISIONARY

ENCHANTMENT

Lewis & Clark in Montana
Last in a Series

MUCH OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK TRAIL REMAINS REMARKABLY UNCHANGED FROM WHEN THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY PASSED THIS WAY 200 YEARS AGO

THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY, writes author Dayton Duncan in *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery*, "saw the West as it was before the rest of their nation followed them across the continent—and changed it forever." The region could not help but change as Easterners began streaming west to settle the new territory. Two centuries after the Lewis and Clark Expedition, nearly 100 million people now live on this side of the Mississippi River. Expansive prairies that crew member John Ordway wrote stretched "as far as our eyes could behold" are now efficient fields of wheat, barley, and sugar beets. Great herds of bison, which Ordway described as so abundant that at times "some of the party clubbed them out of their way," have been replaced by vast herds of cattle. And the majestic Missouri River, which carried the expedition along so much of its journey, has been tamed from its former wild self into a series of flood-control lakes.

Yet, remarkably, much of the Lewis and Clark Trail remains the same—especially in Montana. The state is still home to the grizzly bears and

PHOTOS BY RICHARD MACK
ESSAY BY TOM DICKSON

The Missouri River headwaters, where the Madison, Jefferson, and Gallatin rivers meet at Three Forks, Lewis and Clark passed through here July 24–28, 1805.

Facing page: The White Cliffs of the Missouri River. Clockwise from top left: the lower Yellowstone River; the Missouri River near Hardy; approaching Lemhi Pass from the east; the Big Hole River Valley. Below right: milkweed along the Missouri River near Great Falls.

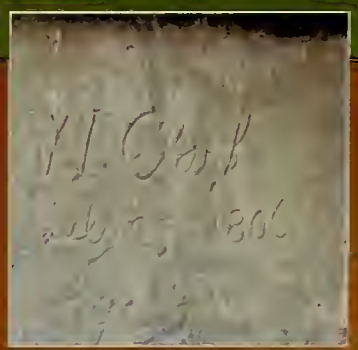
bighorn sheep that fascinated the explorers. In recent decades pronghorn, elk, and deer herds have grown in some areas to sizes approaching what the corps members described. No one harvests trout by the buckerful these days, but anglers still hook plenty of westslope cutthroats, mountain whitefish, and other native fish that kept the corps fed and amused. Though the tall crags are partially impounded by Holter Reservoir, visitors can still view the "dark and gloomy" Gates of the Mountains, which Lewis called "the most remarkable cliffs that we have yet seen." Perhaps most unchanged are the White Cliffs of the Missouri. The pale sandstone formations and dark capstones were "seens of visionary enchantment" that reminded

Color images from *The Lewis & Clark Trail: American Landscapes*, by Richard Mack, published by Quiet Light Publishing. Mack is a commercial photographer in Evanston, Illinois. Tom Dickson is editor of *Montana Outdoors*.

Lewis of an ancient city and continue to mesmerize boaters floating past.

Of course Montana's geology and weather remain as they have for millennia. The east is still flat and the west still mountainous. As it always has, the Yellowstone muddies up each June and runs low and clear in September, and it's still difficult to cross the

Above: The view from Pompeys Pillar on the Yellowstone River near Billings. Below right: Clark's signature carved in the sandstone of Pompeys Pillar is the only remaining visible evidence of the expedition's passage.



Bitterroot Range on foot. Toe-numbing winters, ovenlike summers, swarms of "musquitors," prickly pear cacti, and that inexhaustible wind are no different from what Lewis and Clark endured.

Though the elements shape landscapes over eons, people are what alter rivers, forests, and prairies in the short term. So much of Montana remains unchanged because so much of it remains unpopulated. Several counties house fewer than one person per square mile, and a single area codes serves the entire 550-mile-long state.

One reason for Montana's low human density is the eastern region's lack of precipitation. Where rain does not fall, crop yield is low and communities struggle to

Above: The Yellowstone River west of Miles City. Below: Beaverhead Rock, near Dillon.

survive. If not for irrigation, even more of Montana would resemble what crew member Patrick Gass described as "the most open country I ever beheld, almost one continued prairie."

It has taken more than dry skies to preserve Montana's many natural splendors, however. President Theodore Roosevelt kick-started the conservation movement here and across the United States by setting aside vast tracts of national forests (today Montana has 16.8 million acres). Conservation leaders later fought to establish national wild and scenic river designation (Montana has 368 miles on four rivers) and wilderness areas (3.4 million acres). Hunters worked with conservation agencies to restore

NO LONGER AS THEY WERE Clockwise, from top left: The expedition's arrival marked the beginning of the end of Indians' traditional way of life (L.A. Huffman, 1896). Though wolves are making a comeback, they will never congregate in "vast assemblages," as Lewis described them while near Augusta (photographer and date unknown). The Great Falls of the Missouri River, a major milestone in Lewis and Clark's journey, are now flooded beneath a series of impoundments (photographer and date unknown). Bison, which once roamed freely across the Great Plains, are now confined to parks and ranches (photographer and date unknown). Photos courtesy of the Montana Historical Society, Helena.

big game, upland bird, and waterfowl populations. Anglers marshalled forces to prevent dams from impounding the Yellowstone River and ensure that flows in all state waters remain adequate for fish survival.

Perhaps the most impressive sight on the Lewis and Clark Trail is the smallest one. Captain William Clark's signature at Pompeys Pillar is the only enduring physical evidence along the expedition's entire 8,000-mile-long route to the Pacific Ocean and back. That famous script, carved deeply into limestone, shows how easily and lastingly people can alter their surroundings. Yet the site's preservation as a national monument demonstrates that just as we can change the natural world, so can we protect it, too.

Maintaining a Buckskin Lifestyle in a Polarfleece World

BY TOM DICKSON

Montana trappers try to keep their historic traditions alive in the face of increasing scrutiny from the state's nontrapping majority.

As a young man, Jim Williams spent many winter mornings with his father trapping muskrats and raccoons on his grandparents' Iowa farm. Learning how animals behaved and where they lived instilled in him an interest in wildlife that eventually led to a masters degree in wildlife management from Montana State University. Today the 45-year-old northwest region wildlife manager for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) continues his trapping tradition, cross-country skiing with his wife and two children high into the mountains north of their home in Kalispell to trap martens and weasels.

"My daughter is probably the only kid in her class who has ever prepared the fur of a marten and held one up close," he says.

Like Williams, many of Montana's other licensed trappers say that trapping satisfies a strong need to participate in a traditional activity that takes them deep into the woods to puzzle out the mysterious workings of wildlife.

"Trapping doesn't appeal to everyone, and it never has," says Paul Schmidt, president of the 600-plus-member Montana Trappers Association (MTA). "But it definitely calls to some of us—people who value their independence and like to get out in nature, in the quiet places, and really understand animals and their habits."

That private pastime has been under public scrutiny in Montana recently due to national anti-trapping campaigns and several highly publicized incidents of pet dogs killed in traps. A 1998 FWP survey found that most Montanans (55 percent) support legal, regulated trapping. But trapping in several other western states has been greatly curtailed in recent years. To prevent that from happening in Montana, the FWP Commission has imposed stricter regulations to reduce accidental trapping of dogs and other "nontarget" animals. FWP also wants to make safety and education training mandatory for first-time trappers.

"This department strongly supports trapping," says Don Childress, chief of FWP's Wildlife Division. "And the best way to ensure it continues is by having new trappers learn effective ways to trap and understand public concerns regarding animal welfare and ethical behavior."

Long, rich history

Controversy over trapping is a relatively recent phenomenon considering that people have been capturing animals for meat and clothing for thousands of years. Great Plains Indians trapped foxes, coyotes, and beavers for clothing and, later, to trade with explorers arriving from Europe. Canadian and American fur traders were the first whites to explore much of North America, and trading posts such as Fort Owen near Stevensville (now a Montana state park) were often the first permanent structures built in the West.

When Lewis and Clark ventured across today's Montana, they found a landscape rich in furbearers. "The beaver of this part of the Missouri are larger, fatter, more abundant and better clad with fur than those of any other part of the country that I have yer seen," wrote Lewis in spring of 1805. Expedition member John Colter was twice lured back to the upper Yellowstone River by beavers—and was chased off both times by Blackfeet Indians. By the 1830s, the fur era had all but ended, doomed by unregulated trapping of the easily caught beavers and a European fashion market shifting away from beaver felt hats to those made of silk.

RON BOGGS

MODERN-DAY MOUNTAIN MAN
Following a tradition that stretches back hundreds of years, a trapper studies a beaver dam to locate the best place to catch one of its fur-clad inhabitants.

Contemporary trapping

These days, roughly 3,500 licensed Montana trappers follow in the moccasin footsteps of Colter and other mountain men. Though most trappers only hope to make enough from pelt sales to cover expenses, some people trap commercially—making their living by selling furs or removing predators and nuisance wildlife. Due to higher fur prices and the state's abundant and diverse furbearer populations, licensed trapper numbers have risen in recent years after bottoming out at 1,700 in 1990 following a fur price decline.

Most trappers are after beavers, mink, bobcats, and other furbearers, which requires a license. Also trapped, though with no license requirement, are badgers, raccoons, and red foxes (classified as nongame wildlife), as well as coyotes, weasels, and skunks (classified as predators). Some trapping controls overabundant coyotes and beavers, but most is done to obtain fur, valued for its beauty, warmth, and durability.

Three devices are commonly used by trappers. A snare is a wire noose set along trails, usually for coyotes or foxes, to catch the animal around its neck. Foothold traps,

used for most furbearers, have jaws that shut on an animal's paw, holding the animal until it can be killed or released by the trapper. Body-gripping traps (also called Conibears after a popular brand) are similar to large mousetraps and are used to catch beavers, mink, muskrats, raccoons, and martens.

Except for those who trap only predators such as coyotes and foxes (see "Reaching the less regulated," page 30), trappers must be licensed and abide by seasons, quotas, and limits. The state also requires all traps to be tagged with the owner's name and address or identification number.

FWP biologists keep close tabs on furbearer populations and restrict seasons if numbers dip too low (usually due to habitat loss or a lack of prey). Most trapped species are thriving, however. Trappers harvest roughly 13,000 muskrats, 10,000 coyotes, and 10,000 beavers each year. Wildlife biologists say Montana populations of all three species are healthy.

Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

Because martens, fishers, and other secretive furbearers are difficult to study, wildlife managers rely on trappers for biological information. The pelts of most species must be tagged and registered with FWP biologists. The department also requires trappers to turn in carcasses of fishers and wolverines, which biologists examine to determine age, sex, and diet and better understand population dynamics.

"Most of what we know about fishers, martens, bobcats, and wolverines is from the information we get from trappers," says Brian Giddings, who coordinates FWP's Furbearer Program and is also a trapper.

Because regulated trapping, like hunting, doesn't harm wildlife populations, FWP considers it a compatible part of its wildlife management program.

"As long as it's done responsibly and humanely and doesn't threaten wildlife populations, there's no biological argument against trapping," Childress says.

What is "responsible ?"

Disagreements over what is responsible and humane have been at the heart of the trapping controversy. Recognizing that their equipment could be more humane, trappers now use plastic-laminated foothold traps that put less pressure on an animal's captured limb and usually allow nontarget species to be released unharmed. Foothold traps are commonly used by wildlife biologists to capture wolves, lynx, and other animals for study or relocation.

Schmidt says he and some other trappers carry a long aluminum rod called a release pole that allows them to safely remove animals they don't want in their foothold traps.

The Conibear trap is another matter. Though a humane device for killing furbearers quickly, the trap can also kill nontarget animals, such as dogs, before the animals can be freed.

"The big issue for trapping is dogs out with cross-country skiers," says Giddings. "Most trapping is in winter, when wildlife

RON BOGGS

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NO PAIN TO POPULATIONS Trappers maintain they engage in an age-old pastime that harvests a renewable resource without harming populations of red foxes, martens, beavers, and other wildlife. Wildlife biologists agree, noting that regulated trapping, like hunting, is biologically sustainable and justifiable. The ethical justification, however, remains a contentious issue among some Montanans.

furs are prime. In the past, trappers had the drainages all to themselves. Now more people are using unplowed national forest roads with their dogs, and that's where many trappers set their traps."

In December 1997, a dog owned by a Kalispell couple skiing along a snow-covered road in the Flathead National Forest was killed in a Conibear trap. Public outcry over the incident led the state to establish a citizen's trapping advisory committee and conduct statewide public meetings. Subsequently, the FWP Commission created stricter trapping regulations, backed by the MTA, to reduce the incidental capture of dogs.

The public spotlight again turned on trapping in the winter of 2005 after a dog was caught in a trap in the Bitterroot Valley and shot by the trapper. Responding to local concern over the incident, state representative Gail Gutsche of Missoula introduced a bill in the 2006 legislative session that would have required mandatory education certification before any trapper could get a license. (The bill died in committee due to other provisions, which would have greatly restricted trapping opportunities.)

Recently, the FWP Commission further tightened regulations, requiring ground snares and traps to be set back at least 300 feet from a trailhead and at least 50 feet from roads and trails on public lands.

As the owner of a golden retriever, Giddings is sympathetic to the concerns of dog owners. But he points out that many traps are placed where dogs don't go, such as underwater for beavers or in trees for martens. "And dogs accidentally caught in foothold traps usually can be freed," Giddings says.

Nevertheless, FWP officials acknowledge that dogs are killed in traps each year, and they recognize the likely ramifications of highly publicized pet deaths.

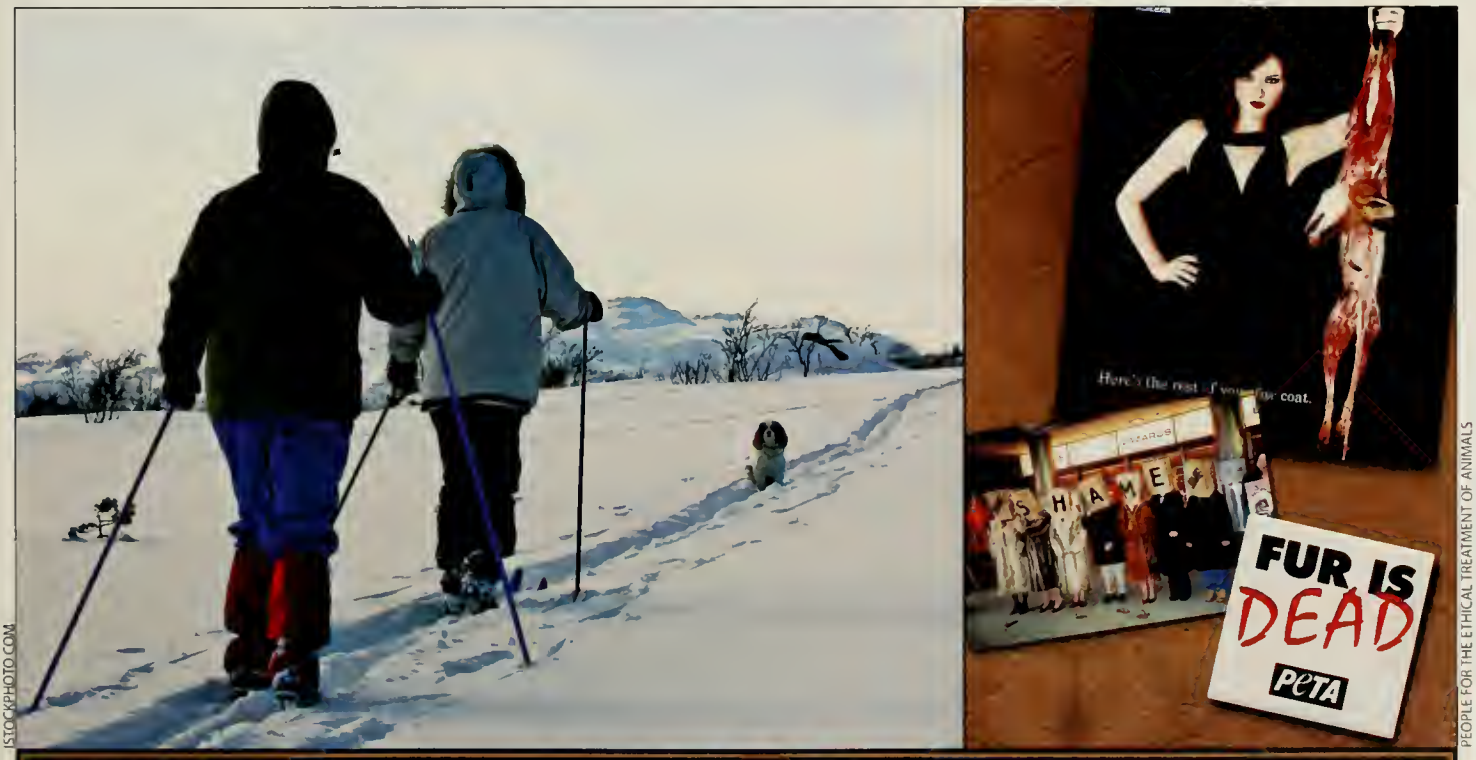
"If dogs are caught in Conibears, that, along with other anti-trapping sentiment, could result in legislation or a ballot initiative that ends certain types of traps or trapping," says Jeff Hagener, FWP director.

Just like bowhunter education

To help reduce conflicts between trappers and other people recreating outdoors, FWP will introduce legislation in the 2007 legislative session to require mandatory education certification for any first-time general trapping license buyer. The education and safety course requirement is modeled after the one the department applies to bowhunters.

"In many respects, trapping is similar to big game hunting in that the public expects the safe use of equipment, appropriate harvest practices, and ethical behavior to create a safe environment," says Hagener. "We've seen increasing conflicts between trappers and the growing number of other people out recreating. The state should require that trappers have a reasonable level of knowledge before they can obtain a state license to harvest furbearers—just like we require for firearm hunters and bowhunters."

The MTA supports the FWP proposal, says Bob Sheppard, a vice president for the group and head of its education committee.



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PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

PUBLIC CONCERNS Responding to Montanans worried about pet safety on public lands, FWP has tightened restrictions to require trapping setbacks along trails, roads, and campgrounds. In Montana and nationwide, ad campaigns by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and other animal rights groups in the 1980s and '90s attacked trapping and the fur fashion industry.

"Mandatory education will be good for trapping. It will put trappers in the field with more knowledge and experience and a better sense of ethics."

Sheppard points out that the MTA has been conducting its own voluntary trapper education program since 1993 and has teamed up with 4-H and FWP to sponsor classes statewide. For the past seven years, the three organizations also have jointly conducted an annual youth trapper camp in Beaver Creek Park south of Havre. The 2006 camp, which Hagener and several other FWP officials attended, drew more than 100 young participants, including Nate Fusselman.

"I learned about wildlife habitats, wildlife diseases, trapping regulations, safety, outdoors ethics, and skinning animals," says the West Yellowstone 12-year-old, who hopes to someday be a nature photographer.

To ensure that future Nate Fusselmans have an opportunity to trap, Hagener says today's trappers must demonstrate they understand larger public concerns and be willing to examine their behavior and techniques.

"Trapping nationwide is in the sights of the animal rights folks," says Hagener. He points to the 1996 ballot initiative in Colorado that resulted in a statewide ban of snares, Conibears, and foothold traps.

"If an anti-trapping ballot initiative could pass in another western state like Colorado, it could happen here," Hagener says. "I'm convinced that better-educated trappers would help take the steam out of the anti-trapping movement."

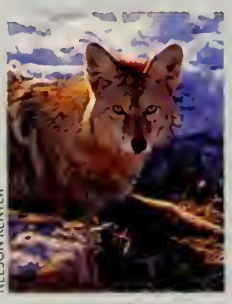
Like many Montanans, trappers bristle at the suggestion that national trends and values can restrict their personal freedoms. "Trappers just want to be left alone to do what we think is right," says Sheppard.

Such liberties may have been possible back in 1911 when Charlie Russell painted "The Free Trappers" and all Montanans had plenty of elbow room. But in a growing state where more and more people—and their dogs—recreate outdoors, and where the vast majority of residents don't trap, public scrutiny of trapping will in all likelihood continue to grow.

MONTANA FWP

FUR EDUCATION A recent FWP program gave students a chance to learn about traps and furbearer biology.

Reaching the less regulated



NELSON KENTER

Coyote and fox trappers don't need a license.

In Montana, setbacks from roads and trails on public lands don't apply to trappers who pursue only coyotes, foxes, and other predators and nongame animals. Because those species are not protected, those trappers don't need a license, and mandatory trapper education would not be required. Nevertheless, FWP Wildlife Division chief Don Childress says trapper education would still reach many coyote and fox trappers.

"If we can't reduce conflicts with regulation, we'll try to do it with education," Childress says. "Many people who trap coyotes also trap furbearers, which requires a license. By requiring certification, we can teach ethical trapping techniques and behavior to many of the trappers we don't reach with regulations."

FWP provides information on trapping regulations and ethics, furbearer management, and how to release dogs and other animals from traps and snares at its website: fwp.mt.gov. Click on "Hunting" and then "Trapping."

IS FUR REBOUNDING?

BLACKGLAMA

Growing worldwide fur sales are boosting pelt prices in Montana.

The American fur industry has seen major changes in the past several decades. Fur became controversial in the 1980s and '90s, as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and other animal rights organizations mounted successful ad campaigns denouncing fur. To resuscitate the flagging industry, a North American mink ranching cooperative launched major ad campaigns of its own, hiring Elle Mac-Pherson and other supermodels to wear mink and counter the "Fur Is Dead" slogan. Meanwhile, Jennifer Lopez and other celebrities began donning mink coats as a counter-culture statement of prestige and style. Booming markets in Korea, China, and Russia have also boosted fur sales.

Coats sold in Bejing can affect fur sales in the United States. The price paid for a marten in Montana has doubled over the past six years to $45. And the pelt price for bobcats—increasingly valued by the fashion industry because spotted cats such as leopards and cheetahs are illegal to sell under an international endangered species treaty—has more than tripled to $345.

Brian Giddings, FWP Furbearer Program coordinator, says fluctuating fur prices affect the number of trappers in Montana, though not substantially. "Most trappers are in it for personal fulfillment and trap no matter what the market is," he says. "But we definitely see a bounce in license sales when fur prices go up, and numbers decline when prices fall."

THREE LONG SECONDS

BY TED KERASOTE
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LUKE DURAN

WHAT WE DECIDE IN A FEW MOMENTS CAN HAUNT US FOR A LIFETIME

We walked through the scattered subalpine fir, through granite outcroppings and intermittent ponds perched far above the distant river, visible occasionally through the trees like a foaming thread. The sun had gone down; dusk was coming.

Scott trailed me, carrying only binoculars. The evening before, we had stalked a bugling elk not far from where we now tiptoed through the forest. Last year it had been my turn to take the first shot, this season his, and I had watched him aim, fire, and bring down the bull. Now I was looking for my year's meat.

We heard the step of a hoof in the evergreens ahead of us, then footfalls moving parallel to us, trying to circle downwind and get our scent. We dropped back through the trees, angling toward the faintest of hoof beats more by instinct than sound, seeing, finally, the animal's tan form cross a sliver of yellow meadow and head toward the dense timber that fell to the river. We sprinted in the same direction, and the bull, his curiosity dominating his caution, stopped suddenly between two trees, staring at us and exposing only his head, neck, and right forequarter. I raised the rifle and sighted at his neck from a little over 100 yards off, the shot perfectly clear down the alley between the trees.

Then the three long seconds began.

There is a difference between marksmanship at the target range and that in the field. Both take into consideration two elements: distance and wind. But shooting in the field adds four more: the upward or downward angle to the animal, the hunter's ability to find a steady rest, how the animal is presenting itself, and adrenaline.

I knew the distance to the elk from having shot thousands of rounds at the range and having watched elk in all sorts of places over the last three decades. I was certain it was no more than 110 yards. The wind was little more than thermal drift directly behind me and of no consequence, the angle downhill barely discernible. However, my shooting position and the way the elk stood became immediate liabilities. At 100 yards offhand, holding the rifle with only unsupported arms, I can keep almost all of my shots in a 10-inch square, plenty good enough to hit a broadside elk in its 18- by 18-inch vital area of heart, lung, and spine. If the bullet is a little off, it still kills the elk. I do even better offhand if I wrap my left arm in the sling, sometimes keeping all my bullets in a 6-inch square at 100 yards. But, surprised by the elk, I had not put the sling around my biceps and it now dangled useless below the rifle. And even if I could keep my shot in a 6-inch square at 100 yards, that didn't mean that, as the elk faced me, I would send a killing blow into the 3-inch-wide spinal area of his neck. I hesitated, shifting the crosshairs to his right shoulder. He stared at me, antlers sweeping sideways and upward behind the trunks of the trees, his mane darker than their knobby boles, his eyes steady.

Hitting his front shoulder would be no problem, but it's not a shot I prefer or have ever taken, for it ruins too much meat, and fundamentally I hunt for food. Nor was I certain that the lightly constructed 165-grain bullet with which my rifle was loaded would make it through all that bone to a vital organ. I use this bullet instead of a stouter and heavier one because of its flat trajectory out to 300 yards. Without resighting my rifle during the season, I can hunt pronghorn, deer and elk in varying terrain. The downside happens when an elk exposes only his front shoulder through the trees, which of course isn't a problem if the hunter is patient and passes on the shot, a prudent trait easily practiced where I live, with its long elk season. A patient and persistent hunter can look for, and almost always find, another elk, one who is willing to stand broadside in the open.

In the flash of a second, I'd factored all of these parameters of marksmanship, and now the murkier elements of this shot, and all it meant, welled into my mind. I wanted this elk now, because Scott had gotten an elk the previous evening, and there is always some little bit of desire to not exceed but match each other's performance, even among the best and most laid-back of friends. This is not competition but symbiosis. I wanted to kill this elk to complete our hunt, making it whole and perfect, as was the case two years ago when we both took elk and led the horses out of the

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Ted Kerasote has written about hunting and nature for many publications, including Audubon, Outside, *and* Bugle, *in which this essay first appeared. His next book,* Merle's Door: How Dogs Might Live If They Were Free, *will be published in 2007.*

SO OFTEN, WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST DO SOMETHI
SHAKY MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PERSONA QUIVERIN

mountains, surrounded by a dust cloud of comradeship and mutual accomplishment. I could already see the two great antlers on the backs of the sorrel geldings.

As the second second vanished rapidly, my thoughts turned from friendship to neighbors and how my ego enjoyed being stroked annually by my larger community. Living in a place where people still praise those who consistently kill elk, I wanted to keep my winning streak going, for I had the reputation of knowing where elk were in the far backcountry, of hunting places too gnarly, steep, and tortured for most people, and of returning year after year with elk. I secretly liked the admiration of my neighbors and wanted to pull off, to be frank, one more coup, including this difficult shot between two trees.

And there was also the comfort consideration, to be sure. Having an elk in the freezer early in the season left the rest of the fall to hunt grouse, pheasants, and ducks in a civil fashion: no 3:30 a.m sub-zero starts; no plodding through the woods on skis and snowshoes; no pulling out hundred-pound quarters on a toboggan. The horses, after all, were waiting just over the rim.

Weighed against this easy recovery, however, was the meat itself. My last year's rutting bull had been tough. Would this rutting bull provide another year of unchewable steaks? Shouldn't I wait for a cow or spike bull? And more to the point, what did I owe the animal himself? He was not a red-and-white sighting-in target, where a flyer on the edge of the paper would receive no more than my passing frown, signifying a blip in my concentration. He was staring eyes and wet nose. He was larynx and esophagus and vocal chords full of reedy bellow. He was scapula and humerus and vertebrae, a spinal cord carrying millions of bits of neural information—sight and sound and smell—to his brain, just as my brain was processing an equal amount of data, including that element that is always part of taking life if the human takes but a millisecond to think about it: integrity.

The last second floated by.

Beyond meat in the freezer and the bonds of friendship, and definitely beyond the invidious workings of my ego, there was what I owed the animal: a death as close to certain as certain can be and as free as possible of the eternal malignant tug of petty revenge for what has been lost and cannot be recovered. For the tiniest bit of the final third second, but perhaps the most significant of all three moments of mental processing, I saw the woman with whom I had shared the last three years and with whom I had recently and finally broken up, one of the casualties of our separation being our hunting together, the loss hurting both of us enormously. Killing this bull would salve my hurt and give me some minor triumph as she drove by my house and saw his antlers in the pickup, signifying better than ever I could vocalize it, "See what you threw away."

The problem with having the courage to be ruthlessly clear about your own motivations is that coming face to face with your shadow side makes you nauseated. I lowered the rifle, thinking that perhaps if only I took the steadier kneeling position....

The bull caught my movement and was gone in a flash.

Turning, I began to walk toward the rimrock, the next basin, and camp. Along the way, feeling, I think, most of what I had felt, Scott said from behind me, "Given the conditions, the light, you did the right thing."

I heard him with only half my mind, for I was thinking of Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad's star-crossed young seaman, who in a moment of indecision finds himself having jumped into a lifeboat with a craven crew, looking up at his sinking ship and the hundreds of innocent, doomed souls he has abandoned. Saving themselves, the crew pulls away. But the ship doesn't sink; the passengers are eventually rescued, and Jim is left with a stigma to bear the rest of his life.

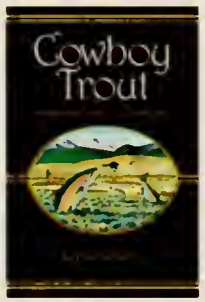
I thought of him—of how close to pressing the trigger my finger had been—and of how, so often, we believe that we must do something, must act in some way to shore up the shaky mental and emotional persona quivering around the rifle, when, in fact, true boldness demands being quiet, examining our inner selves, waiting and doing exactly nothing.

It isn't merely the physical life at one end of the barrel that's at stake, but the spiritual life at the other. And sometimes you get lucky, hesitating into the appearance of quietness, and the animal moves and saves your soul.

G, MUST ACT IN SOME WAY TO SHORE UP THE
AROUND THE RIFLE.

Cowboy Trout: Western Fly Fishing As If It Matters. *Paul Schullery. Montana Historical Society Press. 227 pp. $17.95.*

Paul Schullery likely knows as much about the history of fly fishing in the United States as anyone. While working as director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Vermont, the prolific author was struck by the dearth of information on western fly fishing. "The West's remarkable history was virtually unknown and was apparently in danger of being lost," Schullery writes in *Cowboy Trout*, in which he sets out to correct that wrong. The angling historian documents the early days of western fly fishing, primarily in Yellowstone National Park and the Bozeman area. He then ties together such notable anglers as Warren Gillette, a member of the Washburn Party who in 1870 became the first person to fly fish in what was to become the world's first national park; Norman Means, a Missoula fly tier who invented the Bunyan Bug wood-and-horsehair salmonfly imitation; and Pat Barnes, the popular West Yellowstone guide who developed the Sofa Pillow fly. Schullery also includes Dan Bailey, who adapted his eastern fly-tying skills to western waters and established a world-famous tackle shop in Livingston, and conservation pioneer George Grant on his list of Montana fly fishing legends. A compilation of essays written previously for *Big Sky Journal*, *The American Fly Fisher*, and other magazines, *Cowboy Trout* comes across as disjointed at times. But in combination, the chapters make a convincing case that western fly fishing should matter to historians, cultural anthropologists, and philosophers—not to mention fly anglers themselves.



Field Guide to the Trees of North America. *Keith Rushforth and Charles Hollis. National Geographic. 262 pp. $17.95.*

Ash or elm? Spruce or fir? Ponderosa pine or white pine? If you regularly read *Montana Outdoors*, you likely have a passable knowledge of trees. But if you'd like to move beyond "that's a conifer," National Geographic's new field guide is illustrated and organized in a way that makes tree identification easy. Slim enough to toss in a backpack or glove compartment, the guide features handy symbols that indicate key ID features such as "found in open countryside" and "needles in fascicles of 5." You'll have to read the introduction to learn what a fascicle is.

Yellowstone to Yukon: Freedom to Roam: A Photographic Journey. *Florian Schulz. The Mountaineers Books. 196 pp. $34.95.*

In 1997, a small group of wildlife biologists and conservationists dreamed up a plan to link the existing parks in the United States and Canada with connected corridors to preserve

one of the last fully intact mountain ecosystems on the planet—what they dubbed the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) Ecosystem. The rugged region has been documented in a new book by German photographer Florian Schulz, who spent five years traveling the backcountry from Yellowstone National Park to the Arctic Circle. "I have been in love with this region for as long as I can remember," writes Schulz, who calls the Northern Rockies "a treasure for the world." His 200 photographs are complemented with essays by David Suzuki, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Ted Kerasote, Rick Bass, and other noted authors, scientists, and conservationists, who write of the urgent need to conserve and connect the rapidly disappearing wildlife habitat within the Y2Y region.

Fly Fishing the Solitude: Montana. *Trapper Badovinac. Riverbend Publishing. 120 pp. $29.95.*

Trapper Badovinac is a Montana river rat who has mastered what might be the state's most difficult trout water. Yet despite having spent more than two decades guiding on the Missouri River, Badovinac's heart lies with small mountain streams. A few years ago, he wrote a fishing book divulging the secrets of the Big Mo that caused fellow guides to curse his name. Now he shines a guide's light on four tributaries of the Blackfoot River—which will no doubt pain those streams' current anglers. His focus, however, is not on revealing hotspots but on teaching readers how to find their own secret streams. His basic approach: "I got topos and maps, I searched the Internet, and then I went to the state library and got the biologists' data." Armed with that basic information, he then drives to the streams and begins exploring, "venturing off the beaten path and pushing through the leafy brush."

Field to Feast: The Remington Cookbook. *Jim and Ann Casada. Remington Arms Company and Sporting Classics Magazine. 200 pp. $35.*

The best wild game cookbooks are more than just lists of recipes; they provide new ways of thinking about hunting and the meat we bring to the table. The Casadas have written such a cookbook. In the introduction, history professor and prolific outdoors writer Jim Casada tells of nearly gagging as a boy on a snow goose shot by his father then parboiled for dinner by his mother. Years later, he had the good fortune to dine on goose prepared by a Louisianian who "breasted the birds, inserted a jalapeño pepper, rolled a piece of bacon around it, and held everything in place with a toothpick. He then cooked the tidbits on the barbecue until pink....to my delight, the hors d'oeuvre melted in my mouth." The book lacks photographs of the 200-

plus dishes but is smartly spiral bound to lie flat on a kitchen counter. It includes desserts such as Huckleberry Nut Bread, appetizers such as Clam-stuffed Morels, and main dishes like Venison Parmigiana. The book also contains tips on cleaning birds, picking wild fruit, and turning waterfowl legs and livers into delightful dishes. Adding to the book's appeal are two dozen reproductions of sporting paintings from the Remington Arms Company collection.

It's Easy Being Green: A Handbook for Earth-Friendly Living. *Crissy Trask. Gibbs Smith. 168 pp. $12.95.*

It's one thing to say you care about the environment. But what exactly are you doing in your daily life to leave a smaller footprint on the earth? Crissy Trask has some advice. Founder of an environmental education business, Trask has written an accessible, clearly organized guide to saving energy, reducing waste, keeping chemicals out of water, and adopting greener buying habits. Some examples: Use crumpled newspaper as packing material rather than ozone-depleting Styrofoam peanuts; refill a thermos or ceramic mug at your favorite coffeehouses rather than use the paper or polystyrene cups they provide; and buy a home water filter and refill a plastic bottle rather than purchase costly bottled water. Among the myths about green living that Trask dispels: It's too difficult (she shows how to start slowly until it becomes automatic) and too expensive (it can actually be cheaper if you wear a cozy sweater indoors in winter rather than turn up the thermostat).

Lost in the Woods. *Carl R. Sams II and Jean Stock. Carl R. Sams II Photography. 45 pp. $19.95.*

Each spring, state conservation agencies across the country anticipate frantic phone calls from hikers reporting that "We've found an abandoned baby fawn. What do we do with it?" The answer is always the same: Leave it there.

This lovely children's book explains why. Written and illustrated with photos by a husband-and-wife team, *Lost in the Woods* tells the story of a fawn born on the edge of a meadow who waits until he's ready to run and join his mother. Baby deer have almost no scent. That's their only way of avoiding detection by bears, coyotes, and other predators until they are two weeks old and can flee danger. Mom stays away except to nurse the fawn so her adult scent doesn't attract attention to the vulnerable newborn. The book teaches an important lesson about baby wildlife: If you care, leave it there.

Wings Over Montana. *Donald M. Jones. Farcountry Press. 128 pp. $24.95.*

This is far more than a bird picture book. It's a whole new way of looking at Montana's natural diversity and splendor, seen through the eyes of a wildlife photographer at the top of his game. Especially stunning are images of a drumming ruffed grouse, a landing snow goose, and a perched canyon wren, as well as a remarkable sequence showing a golden eagle driving off a coyote.

The Easy Bird Guide: Western Region. *John and Edith Bull. FalconGuide (Globe Pequot Press). 153 pp. $14.95*

FalconGuide (once part of the Helena-based publishing company now owned by Globe Pequot Press of Connecticut) has long been the gold standard of regional natural resources guidebooks, and this new bird book is no exception. Here's a guide for people who want to identify western birds without earning a Ph.D. in ornithology first. Intelligently organized by color, behavior, and habitat, the guide makes it easy to find and compare the birds it features. Colored illustrations exaggerate key ID elements such as wing shape and head silhouette, enabling the user to quickly distinguish, say, a Clark's nutcracker (longer beak, all-gray head) from a gray jay. One of the best features of this small, easy-to-pack guide is that it doesn't list every single bird of the West but only the 340 most common ones seen in backyards, woods, and wetlands.

The Complete Book of Elk Hunting. *Sam Curtis. The Lyons Press and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. 275 pp. $24.95.*

Sam Curtis has been hunting Montana elk for 30 years and writing about it for almost that long. A contributing editor for *Field & Stream*, writer for *Audubon* and *Backpacker*, and a regular contributor to *Montana Outdoors*, Curtis lives a few miles southeast of Bozeman, where elk come down from the Gallatins and occasionally pass by his kitchen window. His new book distills this experience into easy-to-follow advice that is valuable to both elk hunting beginners and veterans. Curtis talks regularly with wildlife research biologists and managers, giving his anecdotal observations scientific backing. He also draws on the experiences of dozens of elk hunting friends. Ever modest, Curtis never proclaims to be an expert. He admits that, despite his vast experience, the stately ungulates remain an ever-intriguing mystery.

2006 *MONTANA OUTDOORS* INDEX

January–February 2006

This 25th edition of the *Montana Outdoors* annual photo issue features the state's abundant and diverse fish and wildlife, the "other nations" residing in Montana that make this such a wonderful place to live and visit.

March–April 2006

Managing the Big Picture. Why it makes sense to conserve all of Montana's 636 fish and wildlife species. *By Tom Dickson*

The Misadventures of Lewis and Clark. It was July 11, 1806, near the Great Falls of the Missouri, and Captain Meriwether Lewis was not a happy continental explorer.... *By Ben Long. Illustrations by Mike Moran*

Shedding Light on Antler Collecting. Participants say it's fun, fulfilling, and potentially lucrative. But could "horn hunting" also be harming the animals that produce this coveted treasure? *By Tom Dickson*

Montana's Picture Perfect State Parks. Over the past three years, *Montana Outdoors* has profiled many of the state's most historic, scenic, and fun state parks. In this issue, we thought we'd let some spectacular images do the talking. *Photo essay*

Boosting Montana's Quality of Life. A little-known federal program has funded local parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other recreational facilities across the state. But will the money keep coming? *By Sam Curtis. Photos by Erik Peterson*

May–June 2006

Taking Aim at Depredation. Montana's new liberalized elk and deer season is designed to help landowners and hunters. *By Tom Dickson*

Saving the Golden Goose. Will Montana conserve the natural resources fueling its economic growth? *By Tom Dickson*

A Grand Little Canyon. Excellent trout fishing, rich mining history, and breathtaking scenery make Sluice Boxes one of the most delightful state parks you've never heard of. *By Jeff Erickson*

A Whisker Away from Winking Out. Will the pallid sturgeon go extinct on our watch? *By Andrew McKean*

Hatchery Pride. Essential for warmwater fisheries, mountain lake fishing, and protecting some endangered species, FWP's fish-rearing facilities have plenty to boast about. *By Dave Hagengruber*

Wildlife Warriors. "Peaceable kingdom"? Not in the real, often-violent world of nature. *By Sam Curtis*

July–August 2006

The Corps of Botanical Discovery. Lewis and Clark's search for new plants of the West. *By Kathy Lloyd and Drake Barton*

Working It Out with Wolves. How Montanans are learning to live with the state's gray wolf population—and teaching the wild canids to live with Montanans. *By Tom Dickson*

How Does the Small Mammal Cross the Road? A new UM study shows how shrews, voles, and other tiny travelers can move underneath Montana's growing number of highways. *By Kerry Foresman*

Avoiding the ESA Ambulance. Why more landowners are working with FWP and other conservation agencies to keep wildlife from ending up in the Endangered Species Act emergency room. *By Andrew McKean*

Blue Skies for Bluebirds. Once common, then increasingly rare, Montana's three bluebird species have made a remarkable comeback in recent years thanks to a growing legion of nest-box-building devotees. *By Becky Lomax*

September–October 2006

Something to Crow About. Montana's pheasant forecast looks brighter than it's been in years. *By Tom Dickson*

Why We Built the Caverns So Far from the Interstate...(and other great Montana state park stories.) *By Sam Curtis. Illustrations by Peter Grosshauser*

On Montana Safari. Pursuing pronghorn is as close as you can get to an African big-game hunt without flying halfway around the globe. *By Henry Gould*

To Carve a Duck. In Townsend, "Ole" Olsen turns trees into artistic waterfowl attractants. *Story and photos by Dave Sharpe*

Down But Not Out. Loss of sagebrush has dealt sage grouse a hard blow. Now biologists and ranchers have begun working together to conserve habitat and get the great prairie bird back on its feet. *By Dave Carty*

The Underdog. The story of a fat man, a fat Lab...and love. *By Gene Hill. Paintings by Nora Wildgen*

November–December 2006

Big Antlers and Big Egos. Montana cracks down on poachers stealing the state's biggest and best wildlife. *By Dave Carty*

On the Right Track. Reading the daily dramas of Montana wildlife. *By Ben Long*

Still Scenes of Visionary Enchantment. Much of the Lewis and Clark Trail remains remarkably unchanged from when the Corps of Discovery passed this way 200 years ago. *Photos by Richard Mack. Essay by Tom Dickson*

Maintaining a Buckskin Lifestyle in a Polarfleece® World. Montana trappers try to keep their historic traditions alive in the face of increasing scrutiny from the state's nontrapping majority. *by Tom Dickson*

Three Long Seconds. What we decide in a few moments can haunt us for a lifetime. *By Ted Kerasote*

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Black-billed magpie

Pica hudsonia

By Ryan L. Rauscher

The opening day of deer season was a memorable one. For the 18th year, my family and I returned to central Montana for our annual prairie deer hunt opener. This year, my daughter joined the tradition. While scouting with her from a butte, another hunter joined us. It was a black-billed magpie, a crow-sized bird that flew up and landed on a sandstone outcrop just a few yards away. We had been trying to remain quiet and hidden while watching several deer, but the magpie would have none of that. It gave us a loud scolding—blowing our cover—then glided down the rise, landing on a fencepost a short distance from the deer.

APPEARANCE That magpie seemed large for the species. Typically about 18 inches long, this one appeared to be just shy of 2 feet in length. Like all magpies, it was striking in appearance. The head, breast, tail, and underparts were black, with a blue-green iridescence on the wings and long tail. The white belly and shoulders were prominent in the early morning sun as it flew from the fencepost out of sight, continuing its foray.

NESTING Later that day during our deer hunt, my daughter and I found a magpie nest in a wooded ravine the locals call Tree Coulee. The nest was huge compared to those of other birds in the area. Built with twigs and branches and covered with a large dome, it had two entrances. We couldn't see inside, but I knew from previous experience that the nest was a packed mud bowl lined with grasses. It takes about six weeks for the female and male to construct this complex and sturdy nesting structure, and the pair may use it for several years. Raptors often build a nest on top of the magpie nest dome.

Like crows and jays, both close relatives, magpies pick up shiny objects and place them in the nest. This nest was too high in the tree for us to check for trinkets.

REPRODUCTION The female lays from six to nine greenish brown eggs. Over the next few weeks, the male feeds his mate while she incubates the eggs. When the eggs hatch, both parents feed the young. The young fledge after about 25 days. They soon leave the nest and join other magpie broods. The parents feed their own fledglings in these often-raucous groups of a dozen or more birds for another few weeks.

FOOD Magpies are intelligent and resourceful omnivores. They eat insects, carrion, eggs, nestlings, and rodents, as well as berries, seeds, and nuts. Magpies often follow predators to steal morsels from a kill or clean up the leavings. They also pick ticks and other insects from the backs of elk and deer, and will flip over sticks and cow pies to get at the insects underneath.

Near human habitation, they search garbage containers for food and eat from pet dishes left outside. Extremely bold, magpies will enter campsites or even unguarded tents to steal food.

HABITAT Though found in many mountainous areas as high as timberline, black-billed magpies prefer open areas with short vegetation and patches of trees and shrubs similar to the prairie environment where my daughter and I were hunting. These birds also live year-round along rivers and streams and in urban areas and forest edges across the West. Black-billed magpies are found in nearly every county in Montana.

HISTORY Perhaps because of their boldness, year-round residency, and handsome coloration, magpies have long been admired. In some early Indian cultures, a warrior who wore two magpie feathers in his hair was considered fearless. The magpie also plays prominently in Indian myth and legend as both a mischief-maker and a doer of good deeds.

On the way back to the truck, I told my daughter that magpies often followed Indian hunters to feed on any carcasses left behind. I said perhaps the one that landed near us had been doing what the species has done for thousands of years. Nonetheless, she was still upset with the bird for making a racket. I reassured her that the magpie had little to do with our unsuccessful hunt. (And even if it had, I thought to myself, that meant she and I would get to hunt together yet another day—a good deed in any father's book.)

Ryan L. Rauscher is FWP's regional native species wildlife biologist in Glasgow.

A TRUMPETER'S TRAIL

A swan's webbed feet and long wing tips form a unique track trail on a snow-covered lake. Learn how to read other wildlife tracks on page 12, and find out on page 3 why waterfowl don't get cold feet. Photo by Jim Wantulok.

Ranked Number One

For the past two years, Montana Outdoors has won first place in the state conservation magazine competition held by the Association for Conservation Information.

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